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## **Citizenship, Well-Being and Sustainability: Epicurus or Aristotle?\***

*Abstract:* The paper addresses two questions central to recent environmental political thought: Can a reduction in consumption be rendered compatible with a maintenance or improvement of well-being? What are the conditions for a sense of citizenship that crosses different generations? The two questions have elicited two conflicting responses. The first has been answered in broadly Epicurean terms: in recent environmental thought appeal has been made to recent hedonic research which appears to show that improvements in subjective well-being can be decoupled from increased material consumption. The second has usually been answered in broadly Aristotelian terms: republicans have suggested that a public world and projects that are shared over generations are a condition of human well-being. These Epicurean and Aristotelian responses appear to look in opposite directions. They start from different accounts of well-being and appear to look in different places for human flourishing. This paper suggests that the broadly Aristotelian response is in fact owed to both problems. It shows that recent empirical research in the hedonic tradition can be rendered consistent with that Aristotelian response.

### **0. Introduction**

In this paper I want to bring together two themes that have been central to recent green political thought and action. The first concerns consumption and well-being. A condition of sustainability is often taken to be that consumers in advanced economies materially consume less. However, the argument runs that this is politically unlikely to happen if a fall in consumption leads to a perceived fall in well-being. The central problem is this: can a reduction in consumption be rendered compatible with at least maintenance of well-being and if possible an improvement (Porritt 2003)? The second theme concerns citizenship. A great deal of recent green thought has focused on the conditions for creating an environmental citizenship (Dobson 2003; Dobson/Bell 2006). Much of this has concerned quite properly the conditions for a sense of common citizenship in existing national and global societies. However, the civic republican tradition from which much recent work on environmental citizenship has developed also had an intergenerational component that is still evident in writers such as Arendt. A central problem it addressed was this: what are the conditions for a sense of citizenship that crosses different generations? In the following, I aim to examine these two problems, concerning the conditions for well-being and

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the conditions for inter-generational citizenship. I do so in an attempt to reconcile two different responses to those questions in green thought which appear to be incompatible. The first problem concerning consumption and well-being has been answered in broadly Epicurean terms: appeal has been made to recent hedonic research which appears to show that improvements in subjective well-being can be decoupled from increased material consumption. The problem concerning inter-generational citizenship has normally had a broadly Aristotelian answer that appealed to the centrality to human well-being of a public world and public projects that are shared over generations. Those Epicurean and Aristotelian responses appear to look in opposite directions. They start from different accounts of well-being—subjective and objective respectively. They look in different places for human flourishing—in private life and in public life respectively. I will not attempt to overcome those tensions. I think they are real. My central aim in this paper is to give reasons for coming down on one side of the argument. I will suggest that the broadly Aristotelian response is in fact owed to both problems. However I will suggest that recent empirical research in the hedonic tradition can be rendered consistent with that Aristotelian response.

## 1. The Pleasures of Sustainability—Back to Epicurus?

One the central moves in recent green economic theory and social policy has been the appeal to hedonic theories of well-being. The reason for doing so is not difficult to discern. Hedonic research offers the possibility of decoupling growth in consumption from the improvement in well-being. It raises the prospect of decreasing pressures on consumption without a loss in the quality of life and hence of a sustainable economy. Porritt puts the argument thus:

“The recommended prescription as far as radical environmentalists are concerned is simple: people in the rich world must not just consume in more socially and environmentally responsible ways, but must be persuaded to consume less. To bring that about, the hypothesis is advanced that people who have reached a certain level of material comfort and security can (and should) be persuaded that their future quality of life resides in freeing themselves of the trappings of consumerism and in opting instead for low-maintenance, low-throughput, low-stress patterns of work, recreation and home life.” (Porritt 2003, 4)

The hypothesis advanced by Porritt here is one that is taken to have support in recent hedonic research. On the one hand recent research on life-satisfaction suggests there is no direct relationship between the growth in subjective well-being and economic growth. Overall growth in real income has not been matched in a growth in reported happiness. While relative income is correlated with differences in life-satisfaction, so that those with higher incomes tend to report higher life-satisfaction, beyond a certain level of minimal affluence the overall growth in GNP is not correlated with a change in subjective happiness. Life-satisfaction depends upon relative income rather upon absolute changes. Since

comparative position is what matters, general growth in wealth in society as a whole is not correlated with improvement in subjective well-being. Hedonic research is then taken to confirm an observation that Hirsch famously made in *The Social Limits to Growth* concerning positional goods. The race for status and relative income is self-defeating. Each individual makes an individual choice for a good whose worth is affected by the same choice by others. Increased income and consumption is not matched with any increase in life satisfaction. More generally individuals find themselves on a hedonic treadmill in which as they consume more they want more and life satisfaction remains static.

On the other hand not only does hedonic research show that absolute increases in levels of consumption are not correlated with improved subjective well-being, it also shows what the determinants of happiness are. Relative income provides only one determinant of happiness. The other central determinants of happiness are the quality of familial relationships, the security and intrinsic worth of work, health, personal and political freedoms and the quality of wider social relationships in a community including in particular the degree of mutual trust within a community. The ever increasing pursuit of increased private consumption threatens to undermine the very goods that do improve happiness.

“People can be happy with very little wealth and few possessions, or miserable with plenty. Some studies support the view that increased consumption does not automatically lead to increased wellbeing, and some conclude exactly the opposite! Most research indicates that peoples’ quality of life is determined far more by the quality of their working life, their family life and their overall social relationships—all seem to be more important relatively than the amount of consumption they are able to enjoy. And if that consumption is increasingly eroding the quality of those other aspects of overall wellbeing, then it is clearly far less beneficial than it might at first sight appear.”  
(Porritt 2003, 6)

Recent hedonic research allows us to redefine prosperity in a way that renders a transition to a low consumption sustainable society consistent with an improvement in the quality of people’s lives. It does not require unrealistic demands of altruism and morality to be the conditions of a sustainable future. Thus goes the case for discovering the pleasures of sustainability. There is much to be said for it and it is unsurprisingly popular in green circles. Subjective measures of welfare have found themselves to be central to the welfare indices employed in green economics (Shah/Marks 2004; Marks et al. 2006).

Despite its attractions however the shift to hedonic models of welfare has some major problems from an environmental perspective. The problem lies in the model of welfare it employs. A number of its proponents have noticed it offers a return to Bentham (Kahneman et al. 1997; Layard 2005). In the hands of recent environmental thought in fact it in fact goes back a little further to Epicurus. It picks up on an ancient Epicurean theme about the limits of the goods needed for happiness once the determinants of well-being are properly

understood: “Natural wealth is both limited and easy to acquire. But wealth [as defined by] groundless opinions extends without limits” (Epicurus *Principal Doctrines* 15; Inwood/Gerson 1988, 27). What it inherits from that tradition is a subjective state account of welfare. Welfare is a matter of being in the right mental states: “Hedonic psychology... is the study of what makes experiences and life pleasant and unpleasant. It is concerned with feelings of pleasure and pain, of interest and boredom, of joy and sorrow and of satisfaction and dissatisfaction.” (Kahneman/Diener/Schwarz 1999, ix) Elsewhere Kahneman, Wakker and Sarin (1997) refer to “subjective hedonic experience” as “experienced utility”. As Layard puts it: “by happiness I mean feeling good—enjoying life and wanting the feeling to be maintained” (Layard 2005, 12).

What is wrong with that starting point from the point of view of environmental public policy? Well, one answer might be that it is not particularly helpful if we are aiming to develop a sense of environmental citizenship. The concept of welfare as a subjective state was in the Epicurean ideal famously connected with a withdrawal from active public citizenship. Happiness was a matter of securing those stable pleasures that could be realised among a small group of friends. It is not difficult to see why this might be the case. The account does not make relationships with others constitutive of well-being. There is at best a purely contingent relationship between certain social relationships and our well-being. There is nothing in the hedonic model that makes an active public life constitutive of human welfare in the way it is on at least some versions of Aristotelian and Stoic approaches to well-being. There is however an obvious retort to this claim, namely that a contingent relationship between engagement in public life and well-being is strong enough to ground a form of hedonism that is compatible with a public citizenship. Moreover, there is plenty of evidence to suggest that such a relationship does exist. For example Frey and Stutzer offer evidence of a strong correlation between reported subjective welfare and political participation (Frey/Stutzer 2002a, chs. 7–9). Indeed, it might again even suggest a way of reviving citizenship by showing that it improves our subjective well-being rather than making external demands on individuals on the basis of some putative objective account of welfare. Nothing as such rules out a hedonist calling for more active citizenship. There is some power to this response. I do not think that hedonism as such rules out the idea of active citizenship as a determinant of well-being. Where I think the difficulty lies is in the idea that we could create a sense of citizenship over generations. It offers no defensible account of inter-generational citizenship.

## 2. The Conditions for Intergenerational Citizenship—Back to Aristotle?

Why should hedonism have a particular problem with regard to inter-generational citizenship? An initial important observation to make is that nothing in hedonism rules out concern for future generations as such. Indeed a hedonist account of well-being combined with a suitable ethical theory can entail strong obligations for future generations. Thus the classical utilitarian claim that we should

maximise hedonic well-being is normally taken to be blind to the time any agent affected by an act exists. The Benthamite slogan, “each to count for one and none for more than one”, applies as much to distant future generations as it does to our contemporaries. As Sidgwick puts it: “There is no abstract reason why the interest of future generations should be less considered than that of the now existing human beings; allowance being made for the greater uncertainty that the benefits intended for the former will actually reach them and actually be benefits.” (Sidgwick 1887, III.2 fn.9) Going further back to classical Epicurean theorists one finds passages that appear to suggest concern for future generations. Thus for example one of the arguments Lucretius offers to purge the fear of death is the claims of the generations that will follow us.

“There is need of matter for the growth of later generations, all of which, nevertheless, shall follow you when they have lived their lives; and in like matter generations before you have died, and others shall die hereafter. Thus without end one springs from another, and life is granted to no one as possession but as a loan.” (Lucretius 1965, Book 3, 967–971)

Our very deaths are a condition of the welfare of those who follow and should be accepted as such. With some special pleading, the appeal to the ‘need of matter for the growth of later generations’ could be given even an environmental interpretation as suggesting a claim about sustainability. Nothing in the hedonist position rules out concerns for future generations.

The problem for hedonism is not that it rules out concern for future generations but rather the nature of the concern it calls upon. The problem is the obverse of its solution to the problem of consumption which appeals to our own quality of life. When it comes to concern for future generations in contrast it has to make such concern a purely ethical matter that is not tied to how well one’s own life is going. The problem appears in the famous mirror argument in Lucretius that follows immediately after the passage I have just quoted:

“See likewise of how little concern to us were the ages of eternal time that passed before we were born. Nature holds this up to us as a mirror of the time that will be after our death.” (Lucretius 1965, Book 3, 972–975)

As far as our own well-being is concerned life before we existed is a mirror of life after we die. Neither matter to us. If well-being consists in having the right mental states of pleasure and the absence of pain, then neither what happens before or after we die can affect our well-being. Hence, both should be a matter of indifference to us as far as our own well-being is concerned. We may have concerns for future generations but these will be ethical concerns for others. They cannot be concerns about ourselves. The future is irrelevant as far as our own lives go.

There is a more general point to be made here about the role that time plays in hedonic theories of well-being. Hedonic theories of welfare entail that the

value of different moments of time are separable. Informally, to say they are separable is to say that the value of what happens at some point in time,  $t_i$ , is independent of the value at what happens at another point,  $t_j$ . Most recent hedonic theories assume that they are additively separable—that is that the total value of an episode over a period of time is the sum of these independent values. Ramsey expresses the claim well in his account of saving across generations: “enjoyments and sacrifices at different times can be calculated independently and added” (Ramsey 1928, 543). Some care is needed here. Consider Kahneman’s account of what he calls “objective happiness” (Kahneman 1999). “Objective happiness” refers to the aggregate utility derived from a record of actual point by point records of the quality of an experience during some episode. Objective happiness in this sense is still about subjective states. What renders the account objective is the way in which the values of these states are aggregated and assessed (Kahneman 1999, 5). Kahneman takes the objective experienced utility of an episode to be a function of the instant utilities, that is the pleasure or pain experienced at each moment. And the experienced pleasure at one moment can be affected by what happens before and the expectations of what happens after. The temporal location of a moment of pleasure or pain can make a difference to the level that is experienced at that moment. In that sense Kahneman’s account of experienced utility does allow for one kind of non-separability. However, the value of that experience itself is independent of the value of the experiences at other times (see Read 2004, 7). The total value is thus the sum of those values. The assumption of separability is a direct consequence of hedonism. If all that matters to the welfare value of some event at any moment of time is the quality of the experience at that moment then that can be ascertained quite independently of what happens at any moment before or after. It is fixed by the quality of the experience at that instant. Whether or not the event was pleasurable or painful and by how much can be ascertained independently of what happened before or after. On Kahneman’s account the objective characterisation of the subjective well-being of a person over a period of time will be the sum of those independent values.

What is wrong with that characterisation? At least part of the answer is that the shape of an episode seems to matter to our appraisal of the welfare value of particular moments. One way the shape of an episode might matter is evident in Kahneman’s widely discussed experiments on episodes of pain. Episodes of painful experiences that are prolonged by additional but less intense pain produce better global subjective valuations by subjects than a shorter episode without the additional period of pain (Kahneman et al. 1993). Subjects’ retrospective assessments of an episode of painful experiences are a function of the peak intensity of the experience and the intensity of the last moment of the period, and not of the duration of episodes. What appears to matter to patients in these contexts is the overall shape of the episode. Now in this context one possible response is to claim that the subjects make an error of judgement—and that is how Kahneman believes it should be interpreted: “in the absence of any valid reason for the choice, the preference for the long trial must be viewed as a violation of temporal monotonicity—and as a mistake” (Kahneman et al.

1993, 404). They suggest that the mistake is one of memory: because the second episode ends better the subjects have a more favourable, but inaccurate memory of it. In this context I think Kahneman may be right. However there are others in which the structure or a shape of an episode seems to matter as such.

Consider the following example I have used elsewhere (O'Neill 1993, 53–54):

A. A newly married couple, couple A, go on a two week honeymoon. The holiday begins disastrously: they each discover much in the other which they had not noticed before, and they dislike what they find. The first two days are spent in an almighty row. However, while they argue continuously over the next seven days, they begin to resolve their differences and come to a deeper appreciation of each other. Over the last five days of the holiday they are much happier and both feel that they have realised a relationship that is better than that which they had before their argument. The holiday ends happily. Sadly, on their return journey, the plane that carries them explodes and they die.

B. A newly married couple, couple B, go on honeymoon. The first twelve days proceed wonderfully. On the thirteenth day their relationship deteriorates badly as each begins to notice and dislike in the other a character trait which they had not noticed before, at the same time realising that the other had a quite mistaken view of themselves. On the last day of the holiday they have a terrible row, and sit on opposite ends of the plane on the return journey. They both die in an explosion on the plane.

Which holiday goes better? From the hedonic perspective it looks like holiday B. On any simple summing of goods over moments of pain over moments of pleasure holiday B contains far more of the good, less of the bad. This is true even if the short moments of pleasure in A and the short moments of pain in B are particularly intense in virtue of where they feature in the sequence of experiences. However, a few of my more hedonistically inclined students and colleagues aside, most people I've given the example to claim that holiday A is better. What matters is the shape of the episode. They characterise the story of holiday A as a happier one than that of holiday B. What matters here is the narrative structure of the different episodes. What counts in favour of holiday A is the narrative order of events. Crucial to that order is the way in which the story ends. People's lives have a narrative structure, and the ending of a narrative is crucial to the genre to which a person's life, or an episode of that life, belongs—tragic, comic, pathetic and so on. Our evaluation of how well a person's life goes depends on the narrative we can truly tell of it. The temporal structure of a life matters. It matters not just to the overall valuation but to the value we place on different moments in the episode. The value of those moments is not simply a matter of the intensity of the experience at any moment but their place in the larger structure of an episode. In holiday A, the argument at the start of the holiday is not simply a moment of pain. Rather, taken in context,

it might be taken to be a ‘turning point’ in the relationship, one which clarifies the relationship and lays the foundation for the ensuing happiness. Within the context of the individuals’ entire lives, it has another significance. For that reason one can also talk of the earlier event having been ‘redeemed’ by the later reconciliation to which it gave rise. Likewise, the moments of experienced happiness in holiday B are not just pleasures to be valued simply as such. Rather, within the context of the whole story, they are moments of illusion, when each person has a false view of the other, an illusion shattered by the final argument. Had their lives continued, the argument also may have become something else, but the ill fortune of untimely deaths robs the participants of such a future. The values of different moments in an episode are not separable in the way that hedonism assumes. Whether moments of pain and pleasure are goods or evils depends on their context of a life as a whole. Their value is not reducible to levels of intensity considered in isolation.

The shift in welfare valuation here relies on a move to a different account of the constituents of well-being. Well-being is not just a matter of subjective experiences, it is a matter of what one can do or be in one’s life. For example, relationships to others matter as such, not just in virtue of the experiences they bring. What matters in the episodes outlined is not just experiences of the relationships to others, but how those relationships actually are. What matters in holiday B is not just the experiences of pleasure, but their actual significance in the development of a relationship. When it turns out that they are moments of illusion, that the relationship was not actually what they thought it was, then the appraisal of the experiences changes. They are revealed to moments of illusion. And what matters to our welfare is not simply the experience of a relationship that is in good order, but a relationship that is in fact in good order. What matters for our welfare is the good, not simply the experience of the good. What lies behind the rejection of any simple sum of experiences is an appeal to a more objective account of well-being. If what matters to how well our life goes is a matter of what we can actually do or be, then for a number of our central relationships and projects we cannot ascertain the value of moments independent of a larger narrative structure in which they occur. A personal relationship that begins in contention and that ends in reconciliation is valued more than one that begins in apparent harmony and ends in discord. The way in which the earlier moments of contention and harmony are to be understood and appraised depends on the larger narrative. If a person suffers great difficulties in attempting to write a book, prove some mathematical theorem, win some social struggle or whatever, and then ultimately succeeds, the suffering is redeemed in a way that is not the case if the attempt fails. The outcome matters to how the present suffering is to be evaluated. The use of the concept of redemption in everyday non-religious contexts depends on that possibility. The way matters turn out matters. Our lives are not a series of events such that at any moment we can say now whether our lives are going well or badly. The future determines what appraisal we can give to the present.

In shifting from subjective states to what we can do and be we have shifted to a more objective Aristotelian account of the well-being that has been revived



more recently by Sen and Nussbaum. The points about the way our appraisal of well-being is subject to the way lives actually turn out lies behind Aristotle's partial endorsement of Solon's dictum that we can call no man happy until he is dead (Aristotle 1985, Book I, chs. 10 and 11). Aristotle shows some ambivalence about accepting the further entailment of this account, that Solon might be too quick in stopping at the point of death. For if what we actually can do and be that matters, then what happens after our deaths can matter to how well our life can be said to go now. We engage in projects and belong to communities such that how well our lives can be said to go can depend on what happens to the projects and relationships that occur beyond our lifetime. Hence, it can matter to us the way that the future will be and we have a stake in creating a particular future. Consider the activity of doing science. The status of scientific works depends on their relation to both a particular past and a particular future. In relation to the past, a piece of scientific work only makes sense within a particular history of problems and theories to which it makes a contribution. Its success or failure depends on its capacity to solve existing problems where others fail. However, it also depends on a projected relation to the future in terms of its capacity to solve not just existing problems, but also problems not envisaged by its author, and in its fruitfulness in creating new problems to be solved and new avenues of research. Correspondingly, that there exist future scientists educated in a discipline and able to continue work within it matters for current scientific activity.

The same points apply in the arts. The greatness of many works of art lies in their continuing to illuminate human problems and predicaments in contexts quite foreign to that in which they were originally constructed. Likewise, many of the qualities of a work of art may only become apparent in virtue of its relation to future works. In that minimal sense, Eliot is right: "the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past" (Eliot 1951, 15). For this reason, it is of significance for us now that there be future generations able to appreciate the arts and contribute to them. Similar points apply to more 'prosaic' activities. They apply, for example to politics. The success or failure of major political projects normally becomes apparent only well after the political actors have ceased to be active. Witness that of the Bolsheviks in contemporary Eastern Europe. They apply also to everyday working activities, where these involve skilled performances which are embodied in objects and landscapes. Consider the hedgerows of Britain: these are the product of the skilled work of labourers that stretches back for centuries. We fail both past and future if we lose our capacity to appreciate the skill embodied in the hedgerows or create a future social world which contains no appreciation of their value and destroys them as mere impediments to more profitable agriculture.

I noted at the start of this section that the problem for hedonism is that it makes our care for the future purely a matter of impartial ethical care. How the future turns out is a matter of indifference for how well our lives go. In contrast a feature of an Aristotelian objective state account of well-being is that this is not the case. The future matters for how well our lives can be said to go. While we may have ethical concerns for future generations as distant strangers, we also

have concerns that are grounded in the nature of the projects in which we are engaged and which we share with them. We belong to a community engaged in common projects that stretches beyond our own lives. This feature of the Aristotelian perspective opens up the space for an account of inter-generational citizenship. Something of the Aristotelian thought indeed runs through the civic republican tradition. It is found in the civic republican criticism of emerging commercial society in the in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The material foundation of a good society lay in “real property recognizable as stable enough to link successive generations in social relationships belonging to, or founded in, the order of nature” (Pocock 1975, 458). Commercial society, by mobilizing land, undermined that link between generations. The republican theme has remained a refrain in political theory since, developed in different terms in particular within the socialist tradition. The theme is central to the work of Polanyi. Polanyi’s account of land and labour as fictitious commodities, as items that are treated as if commodities, is concerned in part with the consequences of the disruption of social ties of place:

“To allow the market mechanism to be sole director of the fate of human beings and their natural environment . . . would result in the demolition of society. . . Nature would be reduced to its elements, neighbourhoods and landscapes defiled, rivers polluted. . .” (Polanyi 1957, 73)

The separation of workers from the land and the subsequent mobilisation of labour break ties of “a human community to the locality where it is” (Polanyi 1957, 184). The consequences of this disruption in part explain the power of the conservative reaction to economic liberalism that opposed the mobilisation of land (Polanyi 1957, 185ff).

In more modern republican thought, the concern about the conditions for intergenerational citizenship finds another expression in the work of Arendt. Intergenerational citizenship requires a public human world, ‘a common world’: “Through many ages—but now not any more—men entered the public realm because they wanted something of their own or something they had in common with others to be more permanent than their earthly lives.” (Arendt 1958, 55) A ‘common world [that] can survive the coming and going of the generations’ is both a condition and a consequence of that living a life that has significance beyond death. The problem with consumer society for Arendt is that it renders all our goods part of the biological cycles of labour. The durable common world of fabricated use objects that are the products of work gives way to a world of consumer goods: “we must consume, devour, as it were, our houses and furniture and cars as though they were the ‘good things’ of nature which spoil uselessly if they are not drawn into the never-ending cycle of man’s metabolism with nature” (Arendt 1958, 126). The common stable and durable world of the worker disappears. With it is lost a common world that is shared across generations.

There are I think problems with both the eighteenth century civic republican responses to commercial society, and the Arendtian account of modern consumer society. For reasons I have outlined elsewhere I think they raise problems rather

than solutions (O'Neill 2007, 90ff.). For example, the return to stable ownership in land and limited mobility of labour is neither possible in modern conditions, nor is it desirable. The mobilisation of land and labour was a source of liberation from personal servitude and narrow horizons. The problem of intergenerational community is a particular version of problems about individualism and community which have been at the centre of social and political theory for the last two centuries.

However, I will not pursue these problems here. What I think the republican tradition gets right is the concern with specifying the institutional conditions for citizenship that spans different generations for all the problems they may have in their specific accounts of what those institutional conditions are. The question of the institutional conditions for intergenerational citizenship is one that deserves to be taken more seriously in green political thought. However, to take that thought seriously requires a shift from a hedonist to a more objective state account of well-being.

### **3. Sustainability and Well-being—Epicurus or Aristotle?**

If the arguments developed in this paper are right then it looks as if green political theorists face something of a dilemma. There appear to be real virtues in recent revival of Epicurean hedonic theories of well-being in showing how reduced consumption can be rendered consistent with maintaining and possibly improving the quality of our lives. Consuming sustainably is not just a matter of moral sacrifice. However, those virtues disappear when we turn to the question as to why sustainability might matter in the first place. Hedonic accounts of welfare cannot give us an account of the way that the future might matter to our own lives. The future like the past does not matter for us. Our concern for future generations can only be understood in terms of other-regarding ethical commitments. This is not a problem as such, but it does undermine the initial appeal to hedonism. In contrast more objective Aristotelian accounts of well-being do highlight the ways in which the future does matter for us. They offer the basis for an account of nature of intergenerational citizenship and the conditions for its existence. Thus in considering how to best understand human well-being the green theorist appears to be pulled in two conflicting directions. Is a solution to the dilemma possible?

One reason to think that a reconciliation might be possible is the surprising convergence at the level of empirical results between the hedonic tradition represented by writers such as Kahneman, Layard, Frey and Lane, and the Aristotelian capabilities approach represented by theorists such as Sen and Nussbaum. Empirical work from the subjectivist side of the debate has been paralleled by similar observations from the more objectivist capabilities approach. The capabilities approach like the hedonic approach questions the way that changes in GNP can capture changes in well-being. Just as rising GNP is not necessarily correlated with increasing life-satisfaction, neither is it necessarily correlated in improvements in capacities to function an observation that was

influential on the development of the U.N. Human Development Index. At the more detailed level there are also parallels in our understanding of determinants of happiness—the central determinants of happiness in social relations and work parallel central capabilities standard in Sen’s approach (Layard 2005, 113). Moreover the theorists appeal to findings across different traditions. For example Layard in observing the self-defeating nature of the race for status partly calls upon the work of Michael Marmot on inequality and health, work which has situated itself within the capabilities approach (Marmot 2004). When Porritt fills out the details of the determinants of well-being, he shifts after some hedging comments to the more objective needs-based conception of well-being developed by Max Neef (Porritt 2003, 16). Finally, the claim that there are limits to the good required for well-being has been a long-standing part of the Aristotelian tradition just as it was in the Epicurean: “[T]he amount of household property which suffices for a good life is not unlimited, nor of the nature described by Solon in the verse ‘There is no bound to wealth stands fix for men’. There is a bound fixed. . .” (Aristotle, 1948, book 1, ch. 8)

Given the parallels in their accounts of the determinants of well-being there would appear to be room for some rapprochement between the two traditions. However, that possibility appears to be problematic given their different accounts of the constituents of well-being. The apparent convergence at the level of empirical detail appears to be undermined by conceptual and normative disagreements about the nature of well-being. For the subjectivist it is particular psychological states that matter, ‘feeling good’, whereas for the more objectivist capabilities approach it is what person’s can be or do that is of significance. Empirical convergence appears to be vitiated by conceptual and normative disagreement. However, it might be that while the normative and conceptual differences cannot be overcome, I think the empirical results of hedonic research might be made consistent with a more objective approach. They can because it is not clear that much of the research on subjective welfare is about subjective welfare at all.

Consider the questions that are typically employed in surveys on subjective welfare (Layard 2005, 242–243):

i. Taking all things together, would you say you are very happy, quite happy, not very happy, not at all happy?

ii. All things considered, how satisfied are you with your life as a whole these days? Please use this card to help with your answer.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Dissatisfied					Satisfied				

How far do those questions actually capture levels of happiness in the sense of subjective welfare? There are real methodological problems here. One source of the problems lies in a scope fallacy that runs through much of the recent work on hedonic happiness. There is a general tendency to confuse “an assessment of subjective welfare” and “a subjective assessment of welfare”. Consider for example a comment by Frey and Stutzer on these surveys: “Behind the score indicated by a person lives a cognitive assessment to what extent their overall

quality of life is judged in a favourable way... People evaluate their level of subjective well-being..." (Frey/Stutzer 2002b, 405) The first sentence is I think right—the surveys offer a measure of peoples' own subjective assessment of the quality of their own lives. The second claim does not follow, at least if an assessment of subjective welfare is taken to be an assessment of happiness in the sense that that it is used in the hedonic tradition—of psychological states of feeling good and not feeling bad. A subjective assessment of welfare need not be about psychological states in that sense at all.

Consider again the questions asked in life satisfaction surveys. The concept of happiness or satisfaction need not only refer to psychological states. It is also sometimes used to evaluate a person's projects or life as a whole. If asked "how happy are you with your job?" or "how happy are you with your life?" or "how satisfied are you with your life as a whole?" it is not clear that what a person is being asked to sum particular moments feeling good or feeling bad. Rather the natural interpretation is to understand it as an evaluation of how a person's projects or life is going according to her own lights. If pressed a person is likely to talk of achievements and disappointments, with how well or poorly things are going. Asked how happy you are with your job you might reply for example that the pay is poor but that the colleagues are good and the work is interesting. Asked how satisfied you are with your life you may reply that your job is terrible, but you have great family and friends. One is not engaged here in simply summing particular episodes of happy feelings. Rather one is engaged in an appraisal of what one has been able to do or become in dimensions of life that are significant to you. It is quite open to interpret the results as subjective assessments of well-being in the more objective sense, perhaps not in the strong sense it is used by Aristotle (Kraut 1979), but in the sense that it is used by Sen and Nussbaum. It captures people's assessments of how far they have the capacity to achieve valuable functionings—to "the various things a person may value doing or being" (Sen 1999, 75). Given that the results are open to this interpretation the empirical convergence looks less surprising.

The convergence between the hedonic and eudaimonic traditions is in the details of what makes for a good life. They converge on a list of goods central to well-being: the quality of familial relationships; the quality of wider social relationships in a community; the security and intrinsic worth of work; health; personal and political freedoms; political participation. Where they differ is in how the list is to be understood. In the hedonic tradition they are understood as determinants of well-being. Well-being itself is a matter of being in the right subjective states of feeling good, and these are the things that make us feel good. Social relationships, working life, political participation, personal autonomy and the like matter for well-being in virtue of standing in a contingent causal relationship to that psychological state. The result is that these are either treated purely as a means to an end—autonomy is good for example simply because it makes you feel good (Layard 2005, 112–114)—or as distinct values that are not themselves central to the well-being of the agent (Kahneman et al. 1997, 397). Neither looks plausible. In the eudaimonic tradition the list of goods are understood as constituents of well-being. We value a variety of

other goods—relationships with others, accomplishment, interesting work—as central goods of our lives, not merely as a means to the good feelings that they might bring. Indeed, we feel good about fostering such goods because we believe they are of value. We do not just value being in the right subjective states. This is part of the point of Nozick’s well-known experience machine. We would not plug into an experience machine that would promise us a lifetime of blissful experience because “we want to *do* certain things, not just to have the experience of doing them” and that “we want to *be* a certain way, to be a certain sort of person” (Nozick 1980, 43). Similarly if you ask people how happy or satisfied they are with their lives as whole, the answer will reflect people’s judgments of what they have been actually able to do and to be. One is not necessarily getting an assessment of the subjective experiences they have.

We can then, I think, reinterpret the results of hedonic research to which recent green theory has appealed in eudaimonic terms. That interpretation makes more sense of the results. Moreover, it overcomes the tension between the green appeals to hedonic research and the commitment to an account of environmental citizenship that moves across generations. It is because our well-being is about what we can do and be that the future matters for how well our own lives go. There are good reasons to do with our own well-being that we both care about future generations and that we consume now in ways that provide the conditions for a life worth living for them.

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